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Why you need an
electronic
professional
portfolio

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Why you need an *electronic* professional portfolio

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YOU CAN THINK OF an electronic professional portfolio as being similar to an electronic health record. An electronic health record captures all the clinical conditions and interventions over the course of a patient's life. An electronic portfolio captures all professional development data and supporting documents over the course of a nurse's career.

A professional portfolio—whether electronic or paper—contains a summary of education, licensure, and employment history, just as a résumé does. But a portfolio also contains supporting documents, such as copies of educational transcripts, licenses, and letters of recommendation. Subjective documents, such as case logs and exemplars that show competency, also go in the portfolio, as do narratives reflecting on your nursing practice.

Why an e-portfolio?

In the days of paper portfolios, advocates recommended placing all documents related to professional development in a shoebox. But floods, tornadoes, and other surprises can destroy a shoebox filled with pa-

Your key to success is a flexible, up-to-date electronic snapshot of your career.

per in the blink of an eye. An electronic professional portfolio is safe from such natural disasters and, if you regularly

backup your files, your portfolio will also be safe from electronic disasters, such as viruses.

To create an e-portfolio, scan all important documents that aren't in an electronic format, including licenses, certifications, and transcripts. Save these documents and those already in an electronic format, including your résumé or curriculum vitae, patient teaching materials, case studies, and reflective documents, on a portable electronic medium, such as a compact disc. Place one electronic copy in a safe deposit box.

Why a web-based portfolio?

For a more flexible approach, develop a web-based portfolio. Using the Internet allows you to capture professional development data in real time, decreasing the risk that you'll omit important activities. Capturing data in real time also aids reflective journal keeping and ensures that your information is always up to date.

Your web-based portfolio allows you to quickly select information for specific purposes and share it. Just as an artist selects works that are appropriate for a particular show, you can select the professional development activities that are appropriate for a particular event, such as seeking a promotion or new position.

Keep in mind that your web-based portfolio is more than a repository of information. It's a living document you can use to set up alerts and reminders for events, such as licensure and certification renewal. Plus, you can use your portfolio to track your progress on a roadmap, such as a clinical ladder.

Dazzling prospective employers

Today, many institutions and nurse leaders want to develop and maintain a cultural climate of continuing professional competency. When you seek a job in an organization with such a climate, using your e-portfolio will indicate that you are a "cultural fit" and give you an advantage over those who submit résumés.

Renewing your license and certifications

The days of simply obtaining continuing education



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credit for license renewal are drawing to a close. State legislatures and boards of nursing are taking a fresh look at the processes used to evaluate continuing professional competency. And in several states, one component of a revamped re-licensure process may soon be portfolio evaluation.

The International Society of Genetics in Nursing grants certification based on the professional portfolio, and other professional organizations are considering this approach. Professional organizations with limited memberships may replace periodic examinations as a means of renewing credentials with the professional portfolio. Several organizations—including the Wound, Ostomy, Continence Certification group and the Credentialing and Competence Institute—already use portfolios for certification renewal.

Using e-portfolios for credentialing review benefits both the credentialing boards and nurses, such as advanced practice nurses. With e-portfolios, both the application process and the ongoing review process become much less burdensome.

Recruiting and retaining nurses

Healthcare organizations also see the benefits of the electronic professional portfolio. Today, many nursing educational programs require portfolios to better position students for employment after graduation. The portfolios allow hiring managers to evaluate candidates by reviewing subjective data in the portfolio, such as case logs and presentations. This approach provides greater insight into the candidate and should result in improved hiring and decreased turnover.

Organizations are always looking for retention strategies to lower the cost of nursing turnover. Implementing an e-portfolio system—that is, a single repository for *all* professional development activities—can reinforce an organization's commitment to a climate of continuing professional competence and thus improve retention.

Magnet™ recognition and accreditation

A comprehensive e-portfolio system can also help organizations on the Magnet journey. In most institutions, the documents needed for Magnet review are stored in several areas or systems. Pulling the information together can be time-consuming and cumbersome, even when all the information is in an electronic format.

Organizations that implement an e-portfolio system greatly decrease the effort needed to gather certain information, such as “highest degree obtained or highest level of degree.” Also, such information is likely to be up to date because each nurse can easily check and correct the information in his or her personal e-portfolio, which feeds the system.

As with data needed for Magnet recognition, the data needed for institutional accreditations often reside in sev-

eral areas or systems. But if an institution has implemented an e-portfolio system, required data can be collected at a surveyor's request with a few clicks of the mouse.

Teaching by example

Nurse-educators should use e-portfolios for a couple of reasons. First, they are in a great position to demonstrate their commitment to life-long learning by using their own portfolios as examples. Second, educational programs require accreditations, and an important component of the process is a faculty review. Educational programs can achieve the same benefits as healthcare organizations by implementing an e-portfolio system.

Educators can also use students' e-portfolios to make decisions about placing students in clinical settings. Feedback from instructors and mentors at clinical sites should be included in the student's portfolio. Documentation of experience that might provide course equivalency—significant involvement in the National Student Nurses' Association, for example—also goes in the portfolio.

Benefits for all

All nurses and the nursing profession can benefit from e-portfolios. Whether it's a nurse's individual e-portfolio or a healthcare organization or educational program using an e-portfolio system, the benefits are the same: an ability to quickly and accurately demonstrate life-long learning and continuing professional competence. ★

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Professional Documentation Stacking Up?



Today's healthcare professionals need portfolios, but paper portfolios are a real hassle.

Critical Portfolio™, a web-based professional portfolio management solution, goes beyond the conventional curriculum vitae by allowing organizations and individuals alike to develop, manage and maintain portfolios online – replacing yesterday's hard copy processes.

Critical Portfolio™ yields many benefits for both individuals and organizations including:

- ▶ **Demonstrates Competency** – Demonstrate professional growth and achievements by capture, display and distillation of education, papers, case logs, memberships, organizational activities and more!
- ▶ **Creates Customized Portfolios** – Create, store and present portfolios that are organized, individualized, selective and reflective – all based on your target audience (e.g., regulatory agencies, recruiters, instructors, hiring managers, etc.).
- ▶ **Assures Compliance** – Sends licensing and certification reminders to ensure that you are never again out of compliance because of an overlooked deadline.
- ▶ **Promotes Leadership Development and Succession Planning** – Apply organization-specific criteria to define leadership paths and then analyze every nurse portfolio against that criteria.
- ▶ **Reduces Cost and Saves Time** – Say good-bye to copying, mailing and keeping track of paper resumes; say hello to the effortless maintenance of an online portfolio.

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